

Creating Friendly Campus to Support Lactating Students in Federal Universities of Nigeria: A case of Federal University Lokoja

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Abstract

Lactation is a part and parcel of maternity and infant health, hence, these are often greet with issues in the university environment and the work place in generally. Majority of the students and staff are in their productive stage especially in this part of the country, due to the fact that the educational pursuit of the girl child was not given priority. Lactating parents face great deal of challenge in these period of motherhood, with some having to bring their infant child to school during examination, or leaving them behind at home to take exams, classes, facing embracement from lecturers and colleagues, same is usually experienced by staff of the university that has no personal office to breastfeed their babies, the work environment does not make room to accommodate the mother and child in the work. In most cases, most of the public universities don't make provision for conducive and comfortable crèche for the lactating parents. This study seeks to advocate the need to Creates a friendly campus to support Lactating Students and Staff to stabilize their academic pursuits and career progression. It explores experiences and challenges encountered by lactating persons on campus. Three objectives were formulated to direct the study. The study adopts descriptive survey, interview and focus group to collect data for the study, and descriptive statistics will be used to analyze the data collected. The population of the study is lactating mothers studying and working in federal university Lokoja.

Keywords: Lactation-friendly campus, Lactating students, Federal University, Breastfeeding support.

Introduction

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Lactating mothers are student-mothers (biological mothers, adoptive mothers and surrogate mothers) who are breastfeeding their infants while pursuing higher education. Lactation usually begins shortly after delivery and continues as long as breastfeeding or milk expression is maintained. These individuals often face challenges balancing their academic workload with their maternal responsibilities, time management; highlighting the need for institutional support. Inadequate lactation support can lead to physical health issues such as mastitis, engorgement, and stress-related complications. Emotional and psychological stress can arise from the stigma or lack of institutional support for breastfeeding mothers in academic settings. The absence of proper support may lead to premature weaning, which can negatively impact both mother and child.

Lactation is an essential aspect of maternity and infant health yet it often poses challenges in environments where institutional support is inadequate. Many female students in Nigeria, especially in Kogi State, are in their reproductive years and have to juggle childcare obligations with their academic or professional obligations. Historically, women's education in Northern Nigeria has been hindered by cultural norms such as early marriage, making access to higher education more challenging for lactating mothers. (Momoh Jimoh, F.O., Sani, J. O. and Alabi C.O. 2021)

Many universities lack policies or infrastructure to support lactating students, leaving them with difficult choices such as bringing infants to campus or entrusting them to unreliable caregivers. Without designated lactation rooms, hygienic facilities or flexible schedules, lactating individuals experience stress, embarrassment, and disruptions to their studies. This study seeks to advocate for creating a more inclusive and accommodating campus environment, informing policy changes that promotes academic equity for lactating students. Inadequate institutional support to lactating students reduces the rates of exclusive breastfeeding which is needed to optimally protect the health of women and their children. Tampah-Naah, A.M., Kumi-Kyereme, A. and Amo-Adjei, J. (2019) opines that exclusive breastfeeding is one of the strategies that have been identified to reduce infant morbidity and mortality. Breastmilk contains essential nutrients, vitamins, antibodies and diverse mixture of bioactive components that facilitate the development of the immune system, ensure tolerance, appropriate inflammatory response, in addition to providing necessary protection which ultimately ensures optimal growth, development and the health of infants. (Ogundare et al. 2021).

Statement of Problem

Motherhood is both an exciting and demanding phase for lactating parents, requiring them to manage childcare while fulfilling academic and professional responsibilities. In many Nigerian universities, lactating mothers are forced to breastfeed in lecture halls, open spaces, or leave their infants in unsafe conditions due to the lack of institutional support. Federal University Lokoja currently lacks adequate infrastructure for lactating students, with no designated lactation rooms, or supportive childcare facilities.

The study addresses the gap in the empirical research on lactation support within Nigerian universities and seeks to explore the experiences of lactating students. By identifying the challenges they face and proposing solutions, the study aims to advocate for policy shift toward a more supportive academic environment

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the infrastructure required to support lactating students at Federal University Lokoja.
2. To assess the existing infrastructural availability for lactating students in the universities.
3. To examine the challenges faced by lactating students in the university environment.
4. To suggest solutions to improve lactation support within the university.

Research Questions

1. What infrastructure is needed to accommodate lactating students?
2. What infrastructure currently exists to support lactating individuals at the university?
3. What challenges do lactating students encounter?
4. What measures can be implemented to address these challenges?

Literature Review

Sturtevant C. Huebner, C. and Waite, W. (2021) investigated a study titled an Evaluation of On-Campus Lactation Spaces for Student-Parents. The study adopted in-depth interview with 18 student- parents who had expressed milk on campus. The framework of availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality served as the basis for the data collection process, and the study employed thematic analysis.

The result of study showed that, for the majority of participants who had close access to a dedicated lactation space, room availability was outstanding and quality was only just

sufficient. Study desks, in-room sinks, and breast pumps were among the crucial elements of quality that the participants talked about. Also, it stated that because of informational or physical barriers, not all participants used the university's approved breastfeeding facilities. Participants looked for nearby alternatives (such as the lavatory, staff offices or during the academic session) if the designated lactation locations were inconvenient.

Juliana Tindana and Clement Kubreziga Kubuga (2023). Workplace breastfeeding practices and experiences among healthcare professionals in Ghana's Upper East Region. Convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed in the study. Their study took into account the facilities that have a complete breastfeeding support environment (BFSE); the difficulties that health workers in Ghana's Upper East Region face when breastfeeding; coping mechanisms and breastfeeding motivations; and management's understanding of the necessity of an institutional breastfeeding support policy. Thematic analysis and descriptive statistics were used to examine both quantitative and qualitative data. The study was carried out in 2020 between January and April. All 39 facilities in the area are included in the study.

A study explored by Kubuga and Tindana, (2023) breastfeeding environment and experiences at the workplace among health workers in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The outcome of the study discovered that they had inadequate Breast Feeding Support Environment and management representatives of health institutions were not aware that there are specific facilities needed to have a workplace breastfeeding policy that flowed into the national policy agenda. Breastfeeding issues at workplaces to include: lack of private area for breastfeeding; inadequate support from co-workers and management; emotional stress; and inadequate breastfeeding breaks and work possibilities. Women adjusted by using coping mechanisms like taking children to work with or without carers, leaving them at home, asking for help from family and coworkers, giving them extra food, combining maternity and annual leave, nursing in cars, and enrolling kids in daycare. It's interesting to note that the women's motivation to breastfeed persisted. The main reasons for breastfeeding were the health advantages of breast milk, its accessibility and convenience, the ethical duty to breastfeed, and its low cost. Findings reveal that health personnel have poor Breast Feeding Support Environment and are faced with several breastfeeding challenges. There is a need for programs that improve Breast Feeding Support Environment in health facilities.

Pudji Lestari, Dewi Setyowati, and Mikhe Regina Nenohai. (2024). Impact of Kupang Regency's work environment on the conduct of healthcare professionals who nurse their patients. The study employs a cross-sectional methodology and is quantitative in nature. There

were 84 responders in the sample. The inclusion criteria, which include moms who work as health workers and have children between the ages of 6 and 24 months in the Kupang Regency area, were used to select samples. A questionnaire was utilized to collect the data, and the chi square test was employed to analyze the results.

The findings showed that the majority of workplace environments were classified as Fair (53.6%), and that the majority of breastfeeding mothers chose to partially breastfeed (61.9%). In 2022, the coverage of exclusive breastfeeding in Indonesia was only 72.04%, compared to 78.56% in East Nusa Tenggara Province. In 2022, the achievement of exclusive breastfeeding will be 77.2% in Kupang Regency, which is still below the national target indicator. Mothers who exclusively breastfeed may be influenced by an unsupportive work environment. The researcher proposed that health institutions must aid mothers more by providing suitable social and physical amenities. Clear technical instructions must also be included in written policies that govern the rights of nursing mothers. Establishing a welcoming atmosphere for nursing mothers requires the cooperation of all stakeholders.

Methodology

This research utilized a descriptive survey design, using quantitative method. The population consists of 405 lactating students at Federal University Lokoja. Using a simple random sampling technique, 50% of the population was selected for participation. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and out of two hundred and thirty (230) questionnaires distributed, 202 were properly filled and retrieved representing 98 percentage response rate. A rating of (2.50) scale was used determine the mean scores of the respondents and any item ranked from 2.50 above is regarded as positive/accepted while any item below 2.50 is considered negative/rejected. Descriptive statistic was employed for data analysis presenting in frequency and percentage. To ensure ethical compliance, participants provided informed consent, and their responses were kept confidential. The study adhered to guidelines for research involving human subjects

Results

Infrastructure is needed to Accommodate Lactating Students

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	Mea	Remar
O						n	k

1	Designated Lactation Room	123(62.8%)	48(24.5%)	9(4.6%)	16(8.2%)	3.43	Agree
2	Storage Facilities	89(45.4%)	60(30.6%)	18(9.2%)	29(14.8%)	3.07	Agree
3	Hygienic Facilities	71(36.2%)	62(31.6%)	41(20.9%)	22(11.2%)	2.93	Agree
4	Nursing Areas	86(43.9%)	70(35.7%)	23(11.7%)	17(8.7%)	3.15	Agree
6	Signage and Communication	69(35.2%)	53(27.0%)	41(20.9%)	33(16.8%)	2.81	Agree
6	Supporting Services	91(45.4%)	62(31.6%)	25(12.8%)	18(9.2%)	3.15	Agree
7	Flexible Schedule	70(35.7%)	67(34.2%)	38(19.4%)	21(10.7%)	2.95	Agree
8	Confidentiality and Security	57(29.1%)	74(37.8%)	44(22.4%)	21(10.7%)	2.85	Agree

From table 1 above, the result of the analysis revealed that all the items are required for accommodating lactating staff and students with designated lactation rooms having the highest of (3.43) and nursing area and supporting services respectively. The study found that essential facilities such as designated lactation rooms, hygienic breastfeeding spaces, and storage facilities for expressed milk were inadequate

Table 2: Infrastructure Available to Support Lactating Students

S/NO	Facilities	Available	Not Available	Remark
1	Designated Lactation Room	74(39.8%)	122(62.2%)	Not Available
2	Storage Facilities	97(49.5%)	99(50.5%)	Not Available
3	Hygienic Facilities	105(53.6%)	91(46.4%)	Available
4	Nursing Areas	97(49.5%)	99(50.5%)	Not Available
5	Signage and Communication	90(45.9%)	106(54.1%)	Not Available
6	Supporting Services	99(50.5%)	97(49.5%)	Available
7	Flexible Schedule	103(52.6%)	93(47.4%)	Available
8	Confidentiality and Security	101(51.5%)	95(48.5%)	Available

The result from table 2 above, showed that hygienic facilities, flexible schedule, supporting services, and confidentiality and security are available with the percentage of 105(53.6%), 103(52.6%), 101(51.5%) and 99(50.5%) respectively. Most of the required infrastructures are not available within the campus to accommodate the lactating students and staff.

Table 3: Challenges Encountered by Lactating Students in the University Environment

S/N	Challenges	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remarks
1	Lectures are Disrupted many times	53(27.0%)	75(38.3%)	37(18.9%)	31(15.8%)	2.77	Agree
2	Lack of Lactating Rooms	57(29.1%)	92(46.9%)	24(12.2%)	23(11.7%)	2.93	Agree
3	I breastfeed in the Lecture room	52(26.5%)	76(38.8%)	32(16.3%)	36(18.4%)	2.73	Agree
4	I breastfeed in the open Space	51(26.0%)	61(31.1%)	55(28.1%)	29(14.8%)	2.68	Agree
5	Most often, I leave the baby outside	55(28.1%)	73(37.2%)	33(16.8%)	35(17.9%)	2.76	Agree
6	Balancing Academic Responsibilities with Lactating Needs	51(26.0%)	84(42.9%)	35(17.9%)	26(13.3%)	2.82	Agree

Table 3 showed that all item are agreed as challenges encountered by lactating students and staff with lack of lactating rooms with mean value of 2.93 and balancing academic responsibilities with lactating needs has mean value of 2.82 rated as the items with the highest scores. Many lactating mothers had to breastfeed in open spaces or leave their infants outside lecture halls, leading to stress and academic distractions.

Table 4: Solutions to the Identified Challenges Faced by Lactating Students

S/N	Strategies	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
1	Special Consideration to lactating parents	77(39.3%)	81(41.3%)	18(9.2%)	20(10.2%)	3.10	Agree
2	Provision of lactating Rooms	68(34.7%)	73(37.2%)	29(14.8%)	26(13.3%)	2.93	Agree
3	Provision Lactation Rooms	75(38.3%)	87(44.4%)	17(8.7%)	17(8.7%)	3.12	Agree
4	Provision of conducive Space for lactating	65(33.2%)	90(45.9%)	23(11.7%)	18(9.2%)	3.03	Agree
5	Provision of Creche	74(37.8%)	80(40.8%)	23(11.7%)	19(9.7%)	3.07	Agree
6	University Management to handle lactating Students and staff as Special Candidates	75(38.3%)	74(37.8%)	21(10.7%)	26(13.3%)	3.01	Agree

The result on table 4 indicated that the respondents agreed to all the items as solutions for the challenges faced by lactating students and staff. The items with the highest mean values are provision of lactating rooms and special consideration to lactating parents with mean values of 3.12 and 3.10 respectively.

Discussion of the findings

The study found that essential facilities such as designated lactation rooms, hygienic breastfeeding spaces and storage facilities for expressed milk were inadequate while some hygienic facilities and flexible work schedules were available. There was severe lack private nursing area and signage for breastfeeding zones as demonstrated in Table 1 and 2 of the findings. This shortage can have detrimental effects on the well-being and academic performance of lactating students. The study's findings align with prior research by Kubuga and Tindana (2023) highlighted a similar challenge among health workers, noting that they operate in an environment that lacks adequate breastfeeding support, resulting in various breastfeeding challenges. This comparison provides light on the broader issue of insufficient breastfeeding and lactation assistance, not just in health settings but also in educational institutions.

Major challenges identified included lack of privacy, disruption during lectures and inadequate institutional support. Many lactating mothers had to breast feed in open spaces, or leave their infants in our lecture hall leading to stress and academic distraction. These challenges indicate a severe lack of privacy and conducive spaces for nursing mothers, making it difficult for them to balance academic responsibilities with their lactating needs. The highest rated challenges which are lack of lactating room and balancing academic responsibilities with lactating needs underscore the urgent need for infrastructural improvements. This finding agrees with Sturtevant, Huebner, & Waite (2021) which revealed that many lactating students faced difficulties due to the lack of designated lactation rooms, leading them to breastfeed in less private spaces like restrooms or offices. The authors emphasized the need for universities to provide adequate lactation rooms and breastfeeding support to ensure that student-parents could manage their academic responsibilities effectively without compromising their roles as caregivers. Also in alignment is this study with Kubuga & Tindana (2023), health facilities should provide mothers with more social and physical support. Written laws that govern nursing mothers' rights must provide precise technical guidance. The goal of establishing a welcoming atmosphere for nursing mothers must be shared by all. This study parallels the challenges faced by lactating students and in Federal University Lokoja, particularly regarding the urgent need for designated lactation spaces and supportive policies.

In a similar vein, the findings of this study support Nenohai, Setyowati, & Lestari (2024) who conducted a study on breastfeeding behavior among working mothers in Indonesia. According to their findings, mothers were compelled to breastfeed in unsuitable settings due to an unsupportive work environment, namely the absence of adequate lactation facilities, which

decreased the number of exclusive breastfeeding practices. This supports your study's findings that nursing moms at Federal University Lokoja experience comparable challenges, highlighting the need of institutional assistance for nursing mothers. All of these studies show how important it is for businesses and educational institutions to support nursing women by investing in appropriate lactation areas and policies. This will allow them to successfully manage their obligations without sacrificing their academic or professional success.

Provision of dedicated lactation rooms equipped with privacy, storage and hygienic facilities, establishment of on-campus childcare services, introduction of flexible academic schedules for lactating students, implementation of university policies that recognize lactating students as a special category requiring additional support. This is consistent with the research conducted by Bai, Peng, and Fly (2020), which investigated the obstacles to breastfeeding in public places and educational settings. According to their findings, offering designated lactation rooms is one of the best ways to assist students who are nursing. According to the study, having access to private, cosy areas for nursing or milk expression significantly enhanced the capacity of nursing moms to handle their job or school obligations without worrying about discomfort or public scrutiny. Lactating students and staff were more satisfied with institutions that offered breastfeeding rooms, which is in line with the study's recommendations.

Moreover, this study's findings concurred with those of Davis, Babineau, and Wang (2021), who evaluated how institutional rules affected breastfeeding assistance for student-parents in Canadian institutions. According to their research, two crucial tactics for fostering a more welcoming atmosphere were designating specific areas for nursing and allowing lactating parents to have flexible academic schedules. The study's respondents largely favoured laws that give lactating people's needs top priority, such as allowing them to take pauses for breastfeeding or granting them more time during tests or lectures.

Conclusion

To foster inclusive academic environment, Nigerian universities must prioritize lactation support by implementing infrastructure improvement and policy reforms.

Recommendations

1. Universities should create well-equipped lactation rooms to provide private and clean breastfeeding areas.

2. Institutional rules should demand the construction of childcare services within campuses.
3. To accommodate nursing students, university authorities should implement flexible academic timetables and test rules.
4. To encourage a breastfeeding-friendly culture in educational institutions, awareness programs must be carried out. By putting these strategies into practice, colleges may improve the educational experiences of nursing mothers while advancing maternal health and gender equality.

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